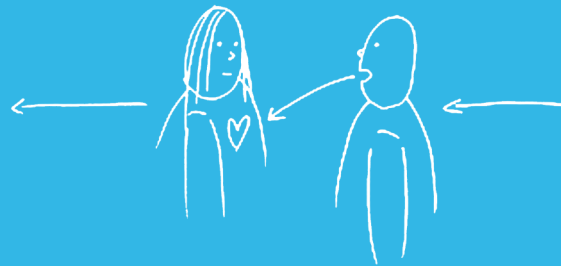


living life dying death

A Guide to Healthy Conversations
about Death and Dying to Inspire Life and Living



Jennifer Collins Taylor

**living
life
dying
death**

A Guide to Healthy Conversations
about Death and Dying to Inspire Life and Living

Copyright © 2010 by Jennifer Collins Taylor

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be used or reproduced in any manner whatsoever without written permission from the author.

This book is designed for general information only and should not be construed as professional advice or counsel regarding any individual or situation.



Healthy conversations about death and dying.

www.livinglifedyingdeath.com

Illustrations by Anthony Taylor

Author Photograph by Colleen Holman

www.photographybycolleen.org

Book Designed by Bruce Elbeblawy

www.bthebookmaker.com

ISBN: 978-0-9679887-7-1

Printed by:

Reach for the Stars®



Five Star Publications, Inc.
PO Box 6698 Chandler, AZ 85246-6698
P 480-960-8112 F 480-960-8178
www.FiveStarPublications.com

The art of living well and the art of dying well are one.

Epicurus

*The subject tonight is Love
And for tomorrow night as well,
As a matter of fact
I know of no better topic
For us to discuss
Until we all
Die!*

Hafiz ~ Mystic Poet



Acknowledgements

Love and gratitude to my family — Matt, Emily, Adam, Anthony, Ray, Elizabeth and Melissa. Special thanks to so many friends and family that have supported this book concept for many years.

I also wish to thank Jane Innes for her wonderful editorial talent and friendship.

Love Remains — In memory of my mother Ardys and brother Tony — whose lives and deaths transformed me.

courageous conversations

Talking about death and dying to inspire life and living.

Repeatedly, through her tears she said to me, “...but, I’ve been meaning to say to him...” Her seriously ill, forty-two year old husband had just been brought into the hospice unit where I was the social worker. He had suddenly become unresponsive and now was actively dying. I listened as she shared with me their lifetime of love and loss.

How many times have you felt uncomfortable searching for the right words to say when someone is seriously ill, dying or grieving?

I have experienced and witnessed many beautiful, tragic, profound, heart-wrenching, life-affirming conversations at the end of life. Why wait to have these meaningful conversations? Share your experiences, ideas, stories, beliefs and questions surrounding death, dying, grief and loss. Quickly you’ll discover how deeply life and death are entwined. This book is a call to action for you to find the courage, comfort and confidence to have conversations about death and dying, with the overarching hope that you will embrace living well and dying well.

- In times of health — reflect on, explore and express your beliefs on the very nature of life and living, death and dying.
- In times of health challenges — use this book as a guide to initiate difficult conversations when faced with the possible decline and death of yourself, friend or loved one.
- In times of grief — use this book to bring support and hope to the dynamic experience of grieving.

Death, loss and grief are natural and universal experiences. Never diminish the sadness, suffering or pain that are present in living and dying, but be open to the release, beauty, and love that are possible by living life fully and facing the fear of death.

Open this book and start a conversation! Share stories, exchange ideas, listen profoundly, understand and accept others as you both explore personal meanings of life and death. Courageous conversations about life and death allow the strength and beauty of the human spirit to shine.

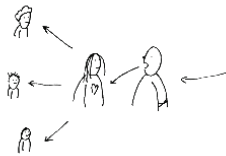


table of conversations

love
acceptance
action
and
beauty
compassion
control
death
dreams
dying
euphemisms
expand definitions
experiences
fear
food
forgiveness
freedom
goodbye
gratitude
grief
honesty
hope
humor
impermanence
joy
language
legacy
life
listen
living
loss
memories
mystery
nature
non-judgment
pain
paradox
patience
peacefulness
pets
philosophy of life
relationships
respect
sadness
silence
simplicity
spirituality
tears
uncertainty
love

love

Start and end every
conversation with words of
love and care.

The words of the
conversation may be
forgotten, but
love remains.

acceptance

Talking about death invites
discovery about
one another.

Part of the human condition
is the need to
feel understood.

What would you like me to
understand about you?

action

Be brave and
open the conversation.

In living and in dying, we
cannot truly know what
another individual needs
or wants until we ask them,
“What can I do for you?”

and

Resist the temptation to always have a single, definitive answer. Embrace the questions that have seemingly contradictory “ands”, such as “Why do I feel sad and relieved?”

beauty

Find comfort in the
beautiful moments.

Beauty is infinite
and individual.

Tap into memories.

Ask, "Does beauty ever die
or does it pass on to
other loveliness?"

compassion

Soften your perspective and
“see the best” in others.

Appreciate even the
slightest personal quality.

Be gentle with yourself
and others as you navigate
matters of life and death.

control

Keep an open mind.

True respect and unconditional love allow for others to make decisions that you personally would not make.

Let go of ways you try to control other people either directly or unconsciously.

death

Gain insights.

Facing our own mortality
takes grace and courage.

Do you believe that death
is a door from which to
pass through or a wall from
which there is nothing
beyond?

dreams

Start some conversations
with your own
dream experiences.

Both nighttime dreams
and lifetime dreams hold
a rich source of
conversational topics.

What do you dream about?

dying

Explore the full range
of understandings,
questions and fears about
the process of dying.

Death and dying are
different from one another.
Are you afraid of dying?

euphemisms

Confront cultural sayings
such as “I’m dying to tell
you,” “to die for,”
and “over my dead body”
as an opportunity to initiate
conversations about death
and dying. What is on your
“bucket list” of things to do
before you die?

expand definitions

Allow your definitions
and experiences of health,
healing and hope to change
and grow. What do you
hope for in life and death?

experiences

Be a storyteller.

People hold lifetimes of
experiences with loss.

What are your experiences
with death, dying,
grief and loss?

fear

Unmask the mysteries.

What are you afraid of?

Is there anything worse
than death?

food

Sustain with love.

Food is a symbol
and gift of love.

It is difficult to remember
that less food is needed
during the dying process.

A person is not dying
because they are not eating,
they are not eating because
they are dying.

forgiveness

Say the words “I’m sorry”
and “I forgive you.”

There is no need to wait for
deathbed confessions.

freedom

Champion the freedom to
make personal choices in
living and in dying.

At the end of life, freedom
and dignity allow for the
dying person to say,
“I did it my way.”

good-bye

Say good-bye each time you part as though it were the last time you might be with that person. Power your good-byes with more than words — a smile, a touch or loving tears.

gratitude

Thank You.....Thank You.....

Thank You

for all things big and small.

Spoken words of gratitude

have the power to heal.

grief

Be gentle with yourself and others.
Grief is physical, emotional, mental
and spiritual. Grief is not a checklist
to “work through” or an experience
to “get over.” Integrate your loss into
your life and continue the bonds you
have with your deceased loved one
in new and lasting ways.
Love and memories remain after
courageous conversations.

honesty

Talk openly, honestly and with kind regard. The act of expressing your thoughts and feelings can bring a sense of relief.

What have you been
“meaning to say”
to someone you care about?

hope

Foster hope.

Hope lives in the land of possibility, mystery and uncertainty. As humans we can hold both the possibility of continued life and the possibility of dying in our hearts and minds at the same time. Hope does not diminish the reality of death.

humor

Humor soothes.

It really takes a sense
of humor when talking
about the human condition!

Laughter radiates
healthy energy.

impermanence

Change is constant.

The cycle of life includes
creativity and destruction.

What can you create?

What can you let go?

joy

Add in the things that bring
you pure joy —
a little each day.

What would your perfect,
joyful last day
on this earth be like?

language

Choose words with positive power. When you say a person “gave up” or “lost the battle” you diminish the dying process.

Use thoughtful words of love, gratitude and remembrance.

legacy

Live your legacy.

Times of sickness and health
are perfect times to move
forward in creating your
legacy. How do you wish to
be remembered?

life

Live life fully.

What might you do today,
so when you are dying you
can say,
"I've had a wonderful life"?

listen

Resist the temptation to fill
each pause with words.

Listen with your heart,
mind and spirit.
What do you hear?

What are
the deeper meanings
behind the words?

living

Savor living.

Living is a verb:

remember back gently...

plan ahead tentatively...

and live fully today.

When do you

feel the most alive?

loss

Consider the losses you have experienced through death, divorce, pet death, financial changes, relationships dissolving, national disaster — just to name a few. Have you found new meanings and values in the losses you have lived through?

memories

Tell and retell stories.

Sharing stories allows for
discovering new possibilities
and insights. The story does
not change — you change.

mystery

Learn to be comfortable
with the mysteries
of life and death.

Where were you before you
were born? Where will you
go when you die?

nature

Celebrate your connection with the universe. Death, dying, loss and grief are natural and universal. Talking about nature lends itself perfectly to the cycles of living and dying. The ocean, wind, stars, animals, rain, earth, flowers, sun and moon have much to teach us. Where are you in the seasons of life?

non-judgment

Reserve judgment.

Tolerance and compassion
are essential qualities in
courageous conversations
about death and dying.

Remember to apply these
qualities to yourself
and others as you navigate
life and death.

pain

Help carry the burden.
Physical pain, emotional
pain and spiritual pain
can seem overwhelming.
When someone you know
is hurting, just ask directly,
“How can I help?”

paradox

Recognize that
life is bittersweet ...

simple and complex
joyful and sorrowful
beautiful and vulgar
comic and tragic
strong and fragile.

patience

Be aware that time can
seem to stand still during
the dying process.

Is patience difficult for you?

What might
unfold in the waiting?

peacefulness

Practice peacefulness.

Where, who, when and what
makes you content,
relaxed and peaceful?

pets

Talk about your childhood
and lifetime pets
who have brought you
love and joy. Pets are a
wonderful example of
unconditional love.

philosophy of life

Explore your
philosophy of life.

What brings meaning, value
and purpose to your life?

relationships

Be present.

What would be left unsaid
or undone if you
died unexpectedly?

What do you need to do to
keep your relationship with
yourself, others and your
higher Source healthy?

respect

Never force a conversation
about death and dying.

There are times in
conversations to “agree to
disagree” or to not state
your opinion altogether.

sadness

Enter into the sadness.

Allow it to be present.

Courageous conversations
sometimes start with
admitting and accepting the
feelings of sadness,
anxiety and fear.
Speak openly about the
feelings of sadness.

silence

Breathe and be
present in silence.

Being with someone in
silence takes courage and
often says volumes.

simplicity

Discover what is essential to
you in living and in dying.

While dying, life is distilled
down to the essential.

spirituality

Engage the spirit.

If you believe in the Divine,
how do you name and
relate to your God?

tears

Let tears flow.

Tears are a release.

Humans tear up when we
are sad, happy, confused,
scared, or even angry. Tears
are a sign that you care.

What do your tears convey?

uncertainty

Remember that not
only does fear live in the
unknown, so too do hope
and possibility.

How might you live fully
today in the uncertainty
and ambiguity of life?

love

Start and end every
conversation with words of
love and care.

The words of the
conversation may be
forgotten, but
love remains.



Courageous conversations about life and death allow the strength and beauty of the human spirit to shine.

This book is a call to action for you to find the courage, comfort and confidence to have conversations about death and dying, with the overarching hope that you will embrace living well and dying well.

- In times of health — reflect on, explore and express your beliefs on the very nature of life and living, death and dying.
- In times of health challenges — use this book as a guide to initiate difficult conversations when faced with the possible decline and death of your self, friend or loved one.
- In times of grief — use this book to bring support and hope to the dynamic experience of grieving.

Continue the conversation at:
www.livinglifedyingdeath.com

...healthy conversations about death and dying ...

Jennifer Collins Taylor, MSW



For thirty years, Jennifer has personally and professionally explored the deep connections between life and death. She has a Master's of Social Work focused in end of life and Hospice care, is a certified music practitioner bringing harp music to the bedside of the seriously ill, and is a Yoga therapist.